

**Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
Meeting Minutes for December 11, 2013
Hospitality Minnesota - Maplewood, MN**

Members Present: Rita Albrecht; Rick Anderson; Bill Bruins; Mike Hulett; Al Lieffort; Keith Nelson; Bryan Pike; Tom Ryan; Tom Schmitz; Barry Wendorf; LuAnn Wilcox

Excused Absence: Marc Mattice; Anita Rasmussen

Guests: DNR Grants Staff - Joe Hiller; Kim Lockwood; Audrey Mularie; Laura Preus; Traci Vibo

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Al Lieffort.

2. Approval of Minutes

Al corrected an error in 5.2 - **Rita** will organize the RFP work group with Marc and Anita participating.

Motion by Hulett, second by Anderson: Approve the minutes for November 27, 2013 as amended.
Motion carried unanimously.

3. Open Time for Public Comment

DNR staff will present a workshop after lunch. No other guests were present.

4. Approve the Agenda

Al amended the agenda to include three additions under Unfinished Business: Review of the discussion and survey regarding regular meetings in 2014; Review and approval of the clerical contract; Review proposed amendment to the duties of Vice Chair.

Motion by Wilcox, second by Ryan: Approve the agenda as amended.
Motion carried unanimously.

5. Consent Agenda

Vice Chair Rita Albrecht reviewed expense reimbursement vouchers prior to the meeting and reported the total amount on the consent agenda as \$4,472.93

Motion by Albrecht, second by Nelson: Approve the consent agenda for the Chair's signature.
Motion carried unanimously.

6. Unfinished Business

6.1 Meeting Dates

The decision on 2014 regular meeting dates will be made in January. The tentative day for regular meetings will be the third Thursday of the month. **The Commission will meet on January 16 and determine the 2014 calendar at that time.**

6.2 Web Page and Photos

LuAnn announced that the list serve is up and running. She also set up an e-mail account for commission business and the "contact us" button: gmrptcommission@gmail.com. Messages received at that address will be forwarded to members as appropriate.

Members discussed whether, or what, biographical information should be included alongside Commissioner photos on the web page. **LuAnn will make suggested changes and bring it back for further discussion.**

Keith raised the need for protocols in responding to media inquiries and suggested they be referred to the Chair, Vice Chair, or a designated public information officer. Al suggested that the Chair provide formal communications, but that informal communications between members and their local press should be unregulated.

Al will consult with Bob Meier (DNR Commissioner's Liaison to the Governor's office) to verify that formal communications go through the GMRPTC Chair, acknowledge that the Commission speaks on behalf of the Governor's office, and assure that communications from the Commission are congruent with the Governor's office.

Motion by Albrecht, second by Ryan: Add to Section II.A that the Chair be recognized as the member who communicates issues to the media. Specific wording to be adopted at the next meeting. **Motion carried unanimously.**

6.3 District Map

Members noted that some suggested changes discussed at the last meeting weren't included in the revisions: remove the word "recommended;" remove parentheses in the key; include a date; correct member cities of residence; pluralize Parks and Trails.

Motion by Wilcox, second by Schmitz: Remove the ampersand from the abbreviation (GMRPTC) and from the name of the Commission; use the word "and" in the name of the Commission. **Friendly amendment** by Pike to compile a list of all suggested changes to move all at once after discussion.

Al will forward the map to Dana Kazel, St. Louis County Media Specialist, and ask that she incorporate the suggested changes to design several versions for comment and approval by the Commission.

Motion carried unanimously.

6.4 Clerical Contract

Motion by Nelson, second by Ryan: Amend the contract to use "payment made monthly" rather than payment on the 26th; Add "This provision may be terminated upon thirty days written notice by either party" under #2. **Motion carried unanimously.**

Motion by Wendorf, second by Albrecht: Approve the clerical contract as amended.
Motion carried unanimously with Wilcox abstaining.

6.5 Amendment to the Duties of Vice Chair

AI suggested adding "Review receipts and disbursements with the Secretary/Treasurer prior to action by the fiscal agent" to II.B.2 of the operating procedures.

Motion by Ryan, second by Hulett: Accept the sentence as written.

Motion carried unanimously.

6.6 District Planning Letter

Members discussed a letter drafted by Bryan to use as a starting point for recruiting participation on the District Planning Committees. A work group will be formed to design the final draft, with an anticipated release in the spring of 2014. **AI asked members to submit suggested revisions in writing to Bryan.**

6.7 Budget Planning and Update

AI reviewed the budget through June 30, 2014 as allowing approximately \$2,700 per meeting, an average of one meeting per month, and \$3,500 for clerical services. \$100,000 for the current fiscal year will be advanced to the City of Bemidji as the fiscal agent, for conducting the business of the Commission. For the fiscal year that begins July 1, 2014 and ends June 30, 2015, the grant amount is \$103,000 for capacity building, but will be a "reimbursement style grant" rather than advanced to the Commission. This necessitates holding funds over in reserve to use after June 30, 2014.

AI opened the discussion of hiring a consultant, an Executive Director, and/or a Project Manager to perform the initial work of the Commission. That work includes: modification of the strategic plan to reflect the formation of the Commission; defining the work of, and the organizing strategy for, the District Planning Committees; convening the committees; designing a process for integrating regional grassroots planning into a Statewide Parks and Trails System Plan. "The most pressing issue," AI said, "is [defining] exactly what the District Planning Committees are and how they function. We need leadership other than the Commission to do [that]" He defined hiring a Project Manager to perform that function as an "urgent task."

A contract consultant proposal from Schoenbauer Consulting, LLC was discussed and led to an in-depth conversation about what work needs to be done and how best to accomplish it. Members suggested that some work may best be done by the Commission, particularly hiring a Project Manager and recruiting the District Planning Committees and Peer Review Team. Members agreed that Schoenbauer Consulting is well qualified, capable, and "the most competent," but that the scope of services proposed should be modified and more limited.

AI will confer with Tom Schmitz and LuAnn to refine the scope of services for the consultant and submit proposed revisions to the Commission. Rita asked that development of the RFP for Project Manager be held for further discussion at that time.

7. Work Session with DNR Grants Staff

Staff introduced themselves and gave a summary of their backgrounds and grant responsibilities.

Kim Lockwood distributed copies of "Division of Parks and Trails 101" which provides an overview of the division's budget, visitation data, and facilities. He estimated that direct staff time for administration of Parks and Trails Legacy Grants totals 1.3 FTE, plus the services of the DNR Office of Management and Budget for policy, finances, and reimbursement payments. He estimated that

20% of that staff time is spent on applications, reviews, and scoring; 80% on the contract agreement, reimbursement process, and project monitoring.

Audrey Mularie distributed a handout and provided an overview of the grant application, review and selection process. A key service they provide is reviewing applications submitted prior to the deadline and offering suggestions for improvement or clarification. She estimated that 50% of applicants take advantage of this consultation. Projects that are ineligible or are better suited to other grant programs are redirected accordingly. Separate applications and different selection criteria are applied to Park Legacy and Trail Legacy projects, with approximately 50% of projects and funding to each. Geographical distribution is not considered in annual grant awards, but is achieved over time. Funding is appropriated to the highest ranked projects.

Joe Hiller reported that 56 applications were received for the 2014 funding cycle, of which 26 were for trails and 30 for parks, totaling \$32 million. 50% of the total appropriation funded 15 legislatively designated projects, leaving \$3.4 million available for competitive grants.

Traci Vibo presented information on grants administration. Once projects are awarded funding, technical assistance is provided to grantees along with a checklist of compliance requirements, including: an extensive environmental review; a natural heritage review; an archaeological review; and an environmental assessment statement. If the applicant has matching federal funds, they submit a Project Memorandum, which can be accepted in lieu of state requirements. The funding proposal becomes the grant management plan and progress is monitored by grants staff through completion. A project administration website is available for assistance throughout the process and provides forms, permits, and required documentation. All grants are on a reimbursement basis and require extensive documentation to process payments. Upon fulfillment, a certification letter of project completion is issued, final payment is made, a sign identifying the project as legacy funded is provided, and the project is listed on the grants outcome website.

Laura Preus stated that DNR grants staff will be available to provide assistance to the GMRPTC, will work more closely with the Commission on the next funding rounds, and possibly provide grants management assistance in the future. Al added that he had discussed with Courtland Nelson, DNR Parks and Trails Director, the possibility of contracting the DNR grants staff to serve as the Peer Review Team for project ranking.

8. Items from Members

Tom Ryan led a discussion of prioritizing the work of the Commission. Members agreed with Al that "District organization is the most urgent task we have" and that selecting an Executive Director is necessary to achieve that. **Al asked Mike and Bill to draft a list of criteria and a selection process for the Executive Director position. Mike asked members to submit two top qualifications required for the position.**

9. Next Meeting and Agenda

The next meeting will be on Friday, January 3, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Sartell City Hall. Agenda items will include: draft recommendations to the legislature; revised consultant contract; revised district map; representation on the Legacy Advisory Committee; finalizing the operating procedures.

Motion to adjourn by Anderson, second by Bruins. **Motion carried unanimously.**